

FEDERAL BUDGET CUTS HURT CONTRA COSTA AND SOLANO FAMILIES

On February 1st, the House is expected to vote on the federal budget for 2006. And in December, the Congress enacted several funding bills for education, health and labor programs. Taken together, these Republican-backed bills will cut critical funding for hundreds of services that help improve the lives of families throughout the Bay Area and California. Democrats oppose these cuts and are expected to vote against the budget next week because the services they cut are desperately needed and because the very same bills provide billions in benefits to multi-billion dollar corporations, including drug and insurance companies, and increase the national debt. Below are examples of cuts to services in Contra Costa and Solano Counties and the state of California:

- ↓ **Child Support Enforcement.** Child support payments are critical to helping a parent make ends meet. Child support enforcement programs reduce the need for local, state, and federal public benefit programs by helping Contra Costa and Solano counties ensure that parents, not taxpayers, support their children to the best of their ability. The Budget Reconciliation bill, scheduled for a final vote on February 1st, makes deep cuts to child support enforcement programs. Once these cuts go into effect in 2008, **California will lose over \$450 million over 5 years as a result of these spending cuts. Child support enforcement programs in Contra Costa County will lose \$2.3 million and Solano County will lose \$4.0 million in 2008 alone. These program cuts are estimated to result in Contra Costa and Solano families making do with \$7 million each year because of unpaid child support.** (Estimates provided by the National Center for Youth Law).

- ↓ **Head Start Early Education.** The Head Start program provides high-quality early education for low-income children aged birth to five. Research shows that attending Head Start is a key tool in helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed in school and life. The appropriations bills for the Departments of Health and Defense enacted in December cut funding for Head Start though it only less than the 50% of eligible preschoolers in families under the poverty line. **Contra Costa County Head Start served approximately 2,843 children last year, but this year, will receive approximately \$180,000 less than they did last year and will be forced to cut the number of children served or the types of services provided – or both.**

- ↓ **Student Loans for Higher Education.** Financial barriers will prevent millions of qualified students from going to college over the next decade. Yet rather than make college more affordable, the Republican budget bill being finalized February 1st will cut \$12 billion out of federal student aid programs in order to finance more tax breaks and giveaways for the wealthy bill and instead force families to pay excessive interest rates on their college loans. Unfortunately, tuition and fees for community colleges in Contra Costa County have nearly tripled between 2002 and 2005. Yet the Republican passed bill will add new fees and costs for students wanting to attend these colleges. **The typical parent in our community who borrows to pay for his/her child's college education, with \$9,460 in debt, will be forced to pay 7% more for their college loan directly because of this Republican bill.**

- ↓ **Child Welfare.** Preventing child abuse and providing high-quality services to children who have been abused and neglected should be one of our nation's top moral priorities. Federal law requires states to place abused children with relatives whenever feasible because best practices and research show this helps these children better cope with their trauma by creating a more stable environment. Provisions in the Republican Budget Reconciliation bill set to be finalized on February 1st will eliminate funding for many of these relative placement services, **resulting in a loss to California of \$217.5 million over 5 years and \$614 million over ten years.** Contra Costa is currently serving 1,868 children in foster care and Solano County is serving 622, and each county is serving hundreds more at other stages in the child welfare system. **Because of the Republican-led cuts, just next year, Contra Costa will lose an estimated \$450,000 - \$1.3 million in federal funding for child welfare services and Solano will lose an estimated \$150,000 - \$450,000.** (Estimates provided by the CA County Welfare Directors Association).
- ↓ **Health Insurance for Low-Income Families.** The Republican-led Budget Reconciliation bill set to be finalized on February 1st will lead to **increases in Medicaid co-payments and premiums and reductions in Medi-Cal benefits.** These changes mean that co-payments for health care services could greatly increase for California families above the poverty line (\$16,600 for a family of three) using Medi-Cal. For example, these changes mean these **families could be charged \$20-\$100 for health care services for which they are now charged only \$3.** Provisions in this bill also could mean **that nearly all of the 3,621,000 California children who now receive comprehensive health care coverage through Medi-Cal, that they are now guaranteed through the Medicaid program, could lose this important health service.** In addition, the changes in this bill also could mean that **the 664,000 elderly Medi-Cal recipients in California could lose eligibility for long-term care services.** (Estimates from The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and Coalition on Human Needs).
- ↓ **Special Education Services.** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides states and local districts with funding for special education services to students with disabilities in elementary and secondary schools and early intervention services to infants, toddlers and preschoolers with developmental delays. This funding is critical to helping school districts provide a free and appropriate public education for all students. However, the Republican appropriations bill for the Department of Education passed in December cuts these important programs. As a result, **Contra Costa will lose about \$34,000 in federal funding for these services and Solano County will lose about \$12,000.**
- ↓ **Adult Literacy.** Even Start is a family literacy program that provides education and related services to parents without a high school degree or G.E.D. and their young children. Its premise is that parents will be better able to help their children learn if they too are literate. Even Start helps our country's poorest families – the average annual income of families in the program is \$6,000. Federal funds for Even Start allows California to fund 139 projects statewide. However, **the Republican appropriations bill for the Department of Education passed in December cuts Even Start by 56%. California estimates it will have to cut half of its Even Start programs. As a result, the three Even Start programs in Contra Costa County could lose all of their \$544,000 funding and be forced to close.**
- ↓ **Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention in Schools.** The Safe and Drug Free Schools program provides federal funds to schools and communities to assist them in reducing drug use and violence among student and youth. These programs are operating throughout Contra Costa and Solano counties providing critical resources to help children grow up safe, healthy and strong. The appropriation bill for the U.S. Department of Education cut funding for these programs by over 20%. As a result, **programs operating in Contra Costa County will receive approximately \$147,000 less this year and programs operating in Solano County will receive approximately \$69,000 less than they did last**

year, drastically reducing opportunities for students in our community to participate in programs aimed at protecting them from drug activity and violence.

“Congress can do a lot better than this, and the families and children in Contra Costa and Solano counties deserve better than this,” said Rep. George Miller (D-CA). “Cutting real services to families and children while lavishing billions in benefits to some of the largest corporations in the country is a gross reversal of the priorities we were elected to address. Congress should reject this budget tomorrow and work on behalf of all of America’s children and families.”